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ABSTRACT

Critical issues in day care and early child education are outlined, and HR Bill 13520 is evaluated. The issues are: (1) the serious shortage of day care for children of working mothers, (2) rapidly increasing evidence that intervention must begin before the age of 3, if the poverty cycle is to be broken, (3) a need for comprehensive, continuous health and education services for children, preferably in the same physical location (perhaps at a Children's Center) for consistency of care and lowered costs, (4) parent involvement in areas of program development and parent education, (5) the need for trained manpower to establish and supervise day care and early education programs, and (6) the urgent need of children for powerful political and professional advocates. HR 13520 is valuable because it would make funds available for day care services, but it should be changed to include children under 3. The bill contains the potential for development of comprehensive child care programs including health, nutritions and social services and daily programs. However, the bill should either (1) detail what these services should include and how they would be coordinated, or (2) provide an administrative mechanism with authority to develop service models, standards, coordinating mechanisms, and quality control methods. If passed, a strong professional advocate to administer the program is essential. The Office of Child Development is suggested as the best agency at present to act in this capacity, but its authority and responsibilities need to be strengthened and expanded. (Author/NH)

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BEFORE THE
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the day care and educational needs of infants and preschool children and how they relate to HR 13520. As Chairman of their Early Child Care Committee, I represent the American Public Health Association, but I also speak as a pediatrician and teacher of Pediatrics, and as an administrator of Health Programs for children throughout California.

I believe HR 13520 is a most important bill, and worthy of careful evaluation. In order for my comments, with regard to this bill, to be put into proper text, it is necessary first, for me to outline briefly what I feel are the critical issues in the field of day care and early child education.

The first and most important issue is the serious shortage of day care available to children of working mothers. Over 12 million children under 14 years of age (1/5 of all children under 14) have working mothers and over 4 million of these children are under 6, and yet, there are liscenced day care facilities for under 1/2 million children. The reason this shortage is serious, is the adverse effect the lack of quality supervision has on the development of these children. Studies have shown that over a million of these children are taking care of themselves while others are in arrangements hazardous to children. Children are left with very elderly, disabled or infirmed caretakers, some are sedated during the day, so they will be less trouble, some older children are kept out of school on alternate days to care for younger siblings. No one could deny that such situations are likely to lead to emotional deprivation, social deprivation, inadequate physical care, cognitive deprivation, inconsistent nutritional practices, and produce a segment of the future generation which will experience delinquency, emotional illness, learning failure, etc. with its enormous human suffering and expense to society.

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The second issue is the rapidly increasing evidence that, if the cycle of poverty is to be broken, intervention must be started before the child reaches 3 years of age. The brain acheives nearly all of its growth by this age, and cognitive or nutritional deprivation prior to this time produces irreversible changes. All of the facts are not in yet in this field, but we

must make every effort to supply each young child with a generally adequate environment while we simultaneously encourage and support the evaluation of various methods of stimulating and educating these children. For example, it is estimated that the average preschool child between age 2 and 5, spends some 2000 hours in front of the TV set, making the potential for planned stimulation and preparation for later schooling enormous.

The next major issue is the need for comprehensive, continuous services for children. At the present time, the typical child receives preventive health care here, curative health care there, educational programs in another place, and day care services elsewhere, all administered and presented by different organizations and individuals. The usual result is inconsistent services in all these areas at a much greater cost to the providers of services. The logical plan would be a children's center, located in conjunction with the neighborhood school, where the preschool child would receive full day care while his older siblings would receive after school care. The center would provide one or two meals a day, the child would receive preventive and curative health care, and a planned daily program conducive to optimal development. The Head Start program is a good start in this direction, but we need to expand both with regard to services offered and age levels of children involved.

The fourth issue is parent involvement. There are two equally important factors here. The first is the contribution which the parents can make to the development of programs for young children so that such programs will meet the needs of their children and their community. The second factor is the contribution which the programs can make to the parents in improving family life. Parent participation in a neighborhood child center would offer opportunities for them to learn about child rearing, nutrition and health practices.

The fifth issue is that of manpower. The establishment and supervision of day care and early education programs demands expertise from several disciplines, and will necessarily stretch the available resources in all of them. The outlook is not hopeless, however, for there is no better place for the establishment of all levels of workers, and this must be developed immediately. The model of a neighborhood mother, properly trained, working under supervision with neighbor's children, in a neighborhood child center, has many exciting advantages.

The sixth, final, and probably most urgent issue, is the need for a powerful advocate for the child in our society. Politically, children by themselves have no power: they don't vote, pay no taxes, generate no profit, and are financial liabilities as their proper rearing must be expensive. While they are the future of society, they must compete for services with all the

urgent immediate demands for money and the overwhelming evidence today is that they are not winning. The majority of school bond elections are lost, we have medicare for the elderly, but no pedicare for the young, in spite of our shocking infant mortality statistics, additional funds for the Maternal and Infant Care Projects and Children and Youth Projects are not forthcoming and the administration's Family Assistance Plan provides money for the purchase of day care, which is clearly for the purpose of encouraging mothers to work without any consideration for the quality of the care the child will receive. In his message to Congress of February 19, 1969, President Nixon called for a "national committment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life" and now, one year later, we find the child losing in the competition for funds in every major area of child care.

In addition to needing a political advocate, the child must have a professional advocate. Children are not little adults, and their needs, whether nutritional, health, or whatever, are not the same. Programs for children, therefore, cannot just consist of allocating funds to purchase services. Interposed between the funds and the services, there must be a professional advocate who sets standards for the service which have teeth in them. Standards without teeth and without a means of surveilance are extremely dangerous, for if funds were to be allocated for child care under these circumstances, it would open up the opportunity for profit making from child care in an area where the margin of profit is directly related to the quality of care given the child. Only the wealthy can afford quality, unsubsidized private elementary schools, and this is even more true of preschool child care.

Let us now turn our attention to HR 13520 and evaluate it in light of these issues. First, it is immediately apparent why I consider this such an important bill, for it would make available funds for the development of urgently needed day care services. I feel that the majority of funds, however, should be for this purpose first, and the funds for educational programs should be for the purpose of encouraging the development, on a small scale, of many different types of approaches with careful evaluative measures included from the beginning.

To provide adequate day care services and experimental educational programs, however, the bill must be changed to include, in all cases, children under 3. With regard to day care, these children are already outside the home in unknown, often undesirable settings, and with regard to the educational programs, these earliest years have been well documented as of prime importance in terms of subsequent intellectual and emotional development.

Next, the bill is excellent in that it contains the potential for the development of comprehensive child care programs including "physical and mental

health services", "food and nutrition services", "specialized social services", and "a program of daily activities". To realize this potential, however, the bill would either have to spell out in much more detail what these services should include and how they would be coordinated, or else provide a mechanism of administration which would have the power and means to develop service models, standards, coordinating mechanisms, and quality control methods. As a specialist in the health field, I will illustrate this with regard to the health services to be included. From our experience in school health programs, and the Head Start Program, we know that it would not suffice to simply provide health screening unless there also existed a method of providing preventive and curative health care, medical and dental, for each child in a comprehensive and continuous fashion. To do this, requires intensive health consultation at all program levels by individuals with expertise both in child health and in the administration of health services. Thus, such consultation would be essential in the Secretary's "Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Programs", in the "State Commission", at the local planning level and to individual projects.

HR 13520 is excellent in providing for parent participation, both at the state level and at the local level where the benefits to both the program and the parents are spelled out. This bill also provides for "appropriate employment of non-professionals" although it does not point out the reasons for this which include aiding the serious professional manpower problem, opening new career possibilities for neighborhood people and reducing the cost of the care.

If this bill, or similar bills, establishing child care programs are passed, a strong professional advocate to administer the program is essential. The Office of Child Development is the best agency, at the present time, to act in this capacity, but to adequately serve this function, its authority and responsibilities need to be expanded and strengthened. The American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics will continue to function as non-governmental, professional advocates for the child.

The authors of HR 13520 have served as political advocates of children, and are to be highly commended for placing the early development of the future generations of this nation as a top priority issue in this Congress. I hope that the distinguished members of this subcommittee will join them in this.

I hope this testimony will be helpful to you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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